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ABSTRACT

One overlooked aspect of heterosocial skills is the selection of appropriate goal objects or partners. The tenet of interpersonal attraction that "like attracts like" suggests that individuals could maximize gains by avoiding dissimilar others. Recent findings suggest that variables relating to lifestyle and sensation seeking are more influential than traditionally investigated variables. A study was conducted to rigorously assess the impact of informational cues on dating choices while avoiding problems associated with post hoc analyses, simulated stranger designs, and heightened saliency effects. Forty-five females and 45 males role played customers at a videodating service. Target tapes included manipulated responses which were read off of cue cards by target subjects. Response alternatives were completely crossed with target subjects. Order effects were controlled through a Latin squares design. The results showed that females preferred males who espoused conservative views on premarital sex, alcohol, and marijuana use by a three to one margin. While also most responsive to lifestyle manipulations, valences of male rating changes were more evenly distributed. Target by manipulation interactions are attributed to swift elimination of some candidates. Cues generated were sorted into a hierarchical coding system. Category frequencies were differentially associated with sex of rater. Males cited appearance and sex role incongruency more frequently while females were more likely to cite interests, values and sense of humor. Six tables and a list of references are included. (Author/ABL)

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The Impact of Manipulated Self Disclosures on Dating Choice

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Abstract

One overlooked aspect of heterosocial skill is the selection of appropriate goal objects or partners. If maintenance of treatment effects is contingent upon social rewards, discussion of selection strategies may represent an important adjunct to skills training. One tenet of interpersonal attraction is that "like attracts like". Clients could maximize gains by avoiding dissimilar others. First we must specify the dimensions on which similarity is critical. Recent findings suggest variables relating to lifestyle and sensation seeking are more influential than traditionally investigated variables. This study sought to rigorously assess the impact of informational cues on dating choices while avoiding problems associated with post hoc analyses, simulated stranger designs and heightened saliency effects.

Forty-five females and 45 males role played customers at a videodating service. Target tapes included manipulated responses which were read off of cue cards by target subjects. Response alternatives were completely crossed with target subjects. Order effects were controlled through a Latin squares design. Females preferred males who espoused conservative views on premarital sex, alcohol and marijuana use by a three to one margin. While also most responsive to lifestyle manipulations, valences of male rating changes were more evenly distributed. Target by manipulation interactions are attributed to swift elimination of some candidates. Cues generated were sorted into a heirarchical coding system. Category frequencies were differentially associated with sex of rater. Males cited appearance and sex role incongruency more frequently. Females were more likely to cite interests, values and sense of humor.

INTRODUCTION

Base rates for heterosocial isolation or frustration and divorce suggest that culturally, adaptation to the emergence of freedom of date and mate selection has been less than ideal (Bryant & Trower, 1974; Greenwald, 1977; U.S. Census Bureau, 1981). For heterosexuals the development of an intimate relationship with a memeber of the opposite sex is seen as a critical step in the socialization process (e.g. Sullivan, 1953). A failure to establish such a relationship has been argued to lead to a variety of undesirable consequences including severe withdrawal, hyperaggressiveness and other signs of personality disorders (LaGaipa & Wood, 1981). Advertisers, publishers, entrepreneurs and clinicians have all recognized young adults' interest in enhancing their heterosocial desirability. Yet we appear to actually know less about the process of heterosocial selection in our own culture than we do about it in others. Basic questions regarding the antecedants of heterosocial acceptance and rejection remain unanswered. Duck and Gilmour (1981) consolidated much of the research on romantic attraction and called for a "comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach."

Limiting ourselves to those who experience heterosocial isolation or frequent rejection, as clinicians we have tended to focus upon dysfunctional cognitive processes, a social phobia or social skills deficits (Perri, 1977). Conger and Conger (1982) pointed out that the causes of heterosocial problems, and accordingly the treatment of choice, no doubt varies from one individual to the next. Some may experience problems that are relatively independent of their actual level of heterosocial popularity (eg. subjective anxiety, unrealistic levels of expectation, infrequent initiation). Expanded models of heterosocial skill have included an increasingly wider range of cognitive variables included realistic goal setting, monitoring and processing capabilities, logical functions, etc. (McFall, 1981; Trower, 1982). One decision making process that is frequently overlooked is the selection of an appropriate goal object or partner. If the maintenance of treatment effects is contingent upon the experience of social rewards, the discussion of selection strategies may represent an important adjunct to skills training.

One basic tenet of interpersonal attraction frequently applied to romantic attraction is that "like attracts like" (eg. Byrne, 1971). Clients could be encouraged to maximize gains by avoiding dissimilar others. First, however, it is necessary to specify the dimensions on which similarity is critical (Rubin, 1973). Research in this area has been plagued by post hoc analyses, confounds involving propinquity, simulated stranger and extreme groups designs and heightened saliency effects. It is unwise to simply incorporate said truisms into clinical work without more rigorous and ecologically valid basic research.

In several studies in which similarity failed to account for much dating choice variance investigators tended to manipulate and investigate readily available preexisting personality measures (eg. Curran, 1973; Kleck and Rubenstein, 1975). High rates of agreement have been found among engaged couples regarding smoking and drinking habits, number of children desired, type of residence preferred (Burgess and Wallin, 1953) and more recently sexual experience or permissiveness and sensation seeking (Eysenck, 1974; Farley and Davis, 1977; Istuan and Griffit, 1980).

This study was designed to assess the impact of informational cues on dating choices without artifically raising the salience of these cues. In all tapes viewed as part of this study, brief cued or manipulated responses were included in simulated videodating interviews. Certain self disclosures were expected to represent critical incidents in the decision making process while others were expected to be outweighed by social competency and appearance. The essential question asked is whether <u>what</u> people say about themselves is a determinant of dating choice in addition to their level of social skill and physical attractiveness. A videodating analog was employed to eliminate troublesome confederate and partner confounds and to provide a believable task that allowed for careful experimental control.

METHODS OF PROCEDURE

Collection of target tapes.

Twenty-five female and 20 male target subjects were recruited from a pool of introductory psychology students. Each subject was interviewed by a trained interviewer of the opposite sex. In training, previously used guidelines for moderate nonverbal responsivity were employed and deviations from the script of questions were limited to "minimal encourages". Interview rooms and camera placements were standardized. After a research assistant introduced the subject to the interviewer they activated a videocassette recorder and left the room. The interviewers shuffled through some papers for one minute and then asked a sequence of 12 open-ended questions (Table 1). Interviewers then introduced the closed-ended questions and manipulated responses as a role playing procedure, asking target subjects to read a set of three responses to each question off of cue cards (Table 2). Questions and answers were repeated if subjects made mistakes or started laughing. Responses were obtained to each of 10 questions, but only six of these questions were utilized in producing target tapes for this investigation.

Editing of target tapes.

From the available target tapes, nine males and nine females were selected for viewing in the second phase of the simulated videodating service. Factors used in selection included consent, the quality of the manipulated responses and the quality of the tape, although these generally were not problems. Beyond this an attempt was made to represent a range of heterosocial desirability as rated by the principal investigator and undergraduate research assistants.

Target tapes were edited so as to consist of 15 segments of the interview followed by 15 pauses during which the screen was blank. The first segment consisted of a 10-second exposure of the target subject as they sat in silence prior to the interview. The remaining 14 segments consisted of the 12 open-ended questions and two of the closed-ended questions with manipulated responses. Manipulated questions were inserted between open-ended questions #4 and #5 and between questions #10 and #11. Since rating pauses followed each question and answer, manipulated responses were inserted without creating an impression of discontinuity in the tape.

Manipulated responses were completely crossed with target subjects so that each target would be seen giving each of three responses to each of the six closed-ended questions. That is, separate tapes were constructed for each of nine male and nine female rating groups. Tapes were constructed so that within each group raters would see nine targets, each of whom answered one of three question sets in one of three possible ways. The overall design can be represented as a series of 3 x 3 Latin squares (with each target subject giving each prompted response) embedded within a larger 3 x 3 Latin square (with each target subject responding to each set of two questions - see Table 3). Through this Latin squares design, the order of presentation of question sets and the order of responses to individual questions was counterbalanced. The order of presentation of questions within a question set and the order of presentation of stimulus subjects remained uniform.

In order to prevent raters from discerning manipulated responses, statements made by targets that blatantly contradicted particular manipulations were removed. Video "noise" was substituted to create the impression of a brief defect in the tape. This was necessary with several target tapes, but at most two or three sentences were omitted.

Selection of videodates.

Raters were recruited from a pool of introductory psychology students. To assure adequate understanding of English, only students who attended high school in the United States were asked to participate. Although five raters from each of the 18 groups were used in this investigation, raters signed up in groups of seven to avoid shortages in certain cells. Raters were necessarily

nested under conditions as represented in Table 3. They came directly to a room equipped with a 25-inch color television monitor, low level lighting, seven chairs and three tables divided into individual work spaces by screens. The room was arranged so that all raters could see the screen clearly but could not see each other's rating booklets.

The videodating paradigm was introduced using a standarized script similar to that employed with target subjects. Subjects were told that "even if you normally would only date one person at a time, you should feel free to select as many or as few of the people you are about to see as you are interested in." To avoid idealistic selections they were also told to "pretend that you had already made a similar tape and were deciding who you would want to invite to view your tape."

After this introduction, subjects' attention was directed to nine prenumbered rating booklets already stacked in front of them. Each booklet provided for 15 repeated measures on a 5-point response scale with verbal anchors ranging from "Feel I definitely would not attempt to arrange a date" to "Feel I definitely would attempt to arrange a date". Subjects were instructed to make a rating after first seeing the target and after each of the 14 questions. Each time their rating changed, raters were asked to briefly explain in their own words why it had changed, with attention being drawn to "anything about their behavior, appearance, personality or answers to the questions."

These repeated measures and cue generation tasks occupied 3 pages of each of the 9 response booklets. On the last page subjects were asked for a behavioral prediction as to whether they would or would not attempt to arrange a date. Also included was a confidence rating scale ranging from 0% to 100% indicating the extent to which they felt this forced choice would correspond to their ultimate decision were they to meet this person in the real world.

RESULTS

Manipulation analysis

A chi square test was used to determine whether manipulations had an overall impact on dating choices. "Hit rates" for each manipulation were calculated by summing across all target subjects and rating groups, with a possible 45 "hits" for each manipulated response. These overall hit rates were not significantly different from chance expectations for male (χ^2=6.87, df=8) or female (χ^2=11.00, df=8) raters. Seperate chi square tests were conducted to test the significance of the effect of manipulated responses within each question set (see Table 4). Expected values were recomputed given that a target was seen responding to a given question set. For females the frequent rejection of males with liberal views on premarital sex and "partying" was significant (χ^2=7.22, $p<.05$).

In that questions within question sets were confounded with one another in determining overall dating choices, an internal analysis of repeated measures was performed to determine the impact of specific manipulations. Expected values were computed for number of rating changes that folowed specific manipulations. Since rating changes were heavily skewed towards the beginning of the interviews, seperate values were computed for the first and second manipulations. As indicated in Table 5, rating changes tended to be differentially distributed across manipulations. Again this was accounted for by the inordinately high number of rating changes associated with the lifestyle manipulations.

Targets were completely crossed with manipulations, consequently a two-way analysis of variance was performed on these factors for terminal ratings and dating decisions. Overall, targets accounted for most of the variance in both of these measures, indicating high interrater agreement with respect to dating choice. Despite this for females rating males there was also a significant main effect for the impact of manipulations on decisions ($F=3.20$, $p<.002$) and terminal ratings ($F=3.96$, $p<.001$). The impact of manipulations on male decisions ($F=2.16$, $p<.03$) and

terminal ratings ($F=3.17$, $p<.002$) was also significant when represented as interval versus nominal level data for the purpose of the ANOVA. With the exception of male decisions, target by manipulation interactions were also significant. The impact of manipulations on the rating of unpopular targets was attenuated by floor effects and their high probability of rejection.

Cue analysis.

Cue data was analyzed in accordance with a heirarchical coding procedure previously described by Conger et.al. (1980). A new coding system was developed and refined based on a pilot study and several revisions following analyses of interrater reliability. Two coders were selected based upon their having achieved the highest chance-corrected average pairwise agreement in prior sorts. Together they sorted 1869 female generated cues and 1446 male generated cues. A subset of 291 cues was blindly sorted by both coders. Kappas were computed as an index of chance-corrected agreement and ranged from a low of .86 at the finest level of specificity to .89 at the third level of specificity.

A relative frequency distribution of cues by categories at the third level of specificity is reported in Table 6. Also included are chi-square tests for the differential use of categories by sex, adjusting for the greater proportion of female generated cues. At this level males most frequently cited factors relating to appearance, while females most frequently cited similar interests. Other frequently cited factors related to perceived self-concept, conversational skills and lifestyle/value similarity or a lack thereof. Cue frequencies were also broken down according to target subject being viewed. Contingency coefficients of .50 ($p<.0001$) for male generated cues and .47 ($p<.0001$) for female generated cues indicated that cues were specific to target tapes and target subjects and were not generated in accordance with implicit beliefs.

DISCUSSION

In assessing social competency researchers have tended to structure tasks and response alternatives so that the subject is encouraged to observe a complete interaction and then respond on a dialectical, bipolar, presumedly interval level response scale. The ecological validity of these ratings as predictors of heterosocial popularity is limited by several factors, including the discrepancy between information processing in these experimental analogs and information processing with respect to real world dating choice. The videodating simulation suggested that decision makers do use static, informational cues in arriving at dating choice decisions. Tversky (1972) hypothesized that in order to simplify choice in a complex world, at each stage of analysis judges select a critical aspect and all alternatives not possessing it (or possessing it) are eliminated. Similarly, most judges in this study eliminated at least some potential dates quickly based upon salient characteristics such as appearance, conversational skill or conflicting lifestyles.

While admitting that it is a necessary first step, clinicians have provided few suggestions regarding the selection of goal objects so as to maximize the probability of acceptance. Both aspects of this investigation suggested the obvious; that students would be well advised to focus upon those they have something in common with. Similar interests can provide a means of "breaking the ice" conversationally as well as potential mutually enjoyable activities. Lifestyle variables relating to sex, smoking and drinking represent critical differences used in the screening process, with conservative males appearing to enjoy an advantage over their "party boy" counterparts. It is not clear to what extent this result would generalize to other age groups or regions of the country. (In fact, it might not generalize to other major universities in Indiana!) Interestingly, in 1958 Hewitt found that males grossly underestimated the impact of sexual conventionality on dating choice and overestimated the importance of car ownership.

This study also highlights the importance of individual differences between judges in the assessment of dating desirability. Even relatively popular targets were rejected by a significant

number of raters. Base rates suggested that an "average" persons who initiates indiscriminately might expect rejection approximately two thirds of the time. Thus clients should not be given an expectation for unmitigated success and perseverance and coping with rejection should be emphasized. Trower (1982) distinguished between social competency and social performance, with the latter including the ability to set appropriate situation specific subgoals. Refinement of decoding skills (McFall, 1981) can also serve to spare potential rejectees the humiliation of an outright rejection.

As noted, significant target by manipulation interactions may have been artifactual to the extent that they were accounted for by floor and ceiling effects. For male targets an alternative explanation is also offered. Byrne (1968) reported that attractive males are typically stereotyped as immoral and unintelligent. When at least one relatively attractive male target broke the "party boy" stereotype with conservative cued response, there was a fairly dramatic increase in his overall popularity. Accompanying these rating changes were comments such as "guess I had him figured all wrong" or "didn't expect that, seems like a nice guy". (Other sterotypes noted included "typical frat boy, sororiety girl, farm boy, typical Hoosier, ROTC guy, air head, typical M-E, a frosh, etc.)

In terms of overall cue frequency, the most dramatic sex difference obtained was male raters' more frequent reference to appearance. Symons (1981) has argued that through natural selection males as primates have become more responsive to visual cues than females. This remains to be demonstrated, but at least in ideal choice situations appearance is quite salient to males as well as females. There were no signs that equity or matching considerations entered into decisions, and in real life we do not know to what extent self-evaluations and a fear of rejection may attenuate this preference of the many for the few. Self-concept (eg. snob, thinks too much of himself, seems unsure of himself, lack of confidence) also emerged as an important dating cue. Perhaps most encouraging was the finding that there was sufficient variance in individual preferences such that each target was selected by at least one of the 45 raters.

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Table 1

Open-ended Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. How do you see yourself five years from now?
3. What do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses as an individual?
4. What are some of the things that you value?
5. What do you look for in a dating partner?
6. Tell me a little bit about some of your hobbies or interests.
7. Let's say it's Saturday night and you are about to go on your first videodate. Where might you go or what might you do?
8. What is your family like?
9. Let's say that you were going to be stranded all alone on a desert island for a year. Name three things that you might bring.
10. What do you think of social life here at Purdue?
11. How do you feel about marriage? (If answers in a general way "Would you consider getting married if you met the 'right person'?")
12. How do you feel about life at the present time?

Table 2

Closed-ended with Prompted Responses

Question Set 1

1. Do you smoke pot or drink?

    a. Yeah, I like to party.
    b. Oh, I drink wine sometimes.
    c. No, I never have.

2. How do you feel about premarital sex?

    a. Great, why not?
    b. It's fine as long as you've been going together awhile.
    c. I feel it's best to wait.

Question Set 2

1. What religion are you?

    a. Catholic.
    b. Jewish.
    c. Not any, really.

2. How many people have you dated this past year?

    a. None.
    b. Three.
    c. About twenty.

Question Set 3

1. What kind of car do you drive?

    a. A 1982 Corvette.
    b. A 1963 Volkswagen.
    c. I can't afford one.

2. What is your GPA here at Purdue?

    a. 5.9
    b. 4.9
    c. 3.9

Table 3

Embedded Latin Squares Design

Target Subjects

		1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
	1	Question	Question	Question
	2	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3
	3			
Rating	4	Question	Question	Question
Group	5	Set 2	Set 3	Set 1
	6			
	7	Question	Question	Question
	8	Set 3	Set 1	Set 2
	9			

Responses Given by Target Subjects*

		1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
	1	a b c	a b c	a b c
	2	b c a	b c a	b c a
	3	c a b	c a b	c a b
Rating	4	a b c	a b c	a b c
Group	5	b c a	b c a	b c a
	6	c a b	c a b	c a b
	7	a b c	a b c	a b c
	8	b c a	b c a	b c a
	9	c a b	c a b	c a b

*Responses to question sets 1, 2 and 3 are independent, therefore it should not matter that each rating group is seeing a consistent pattern of response (e.g., "c a b").

Table 4

Chi Square Tests for Effects of Manipulated Responses Within Question Sets (2 df)

	Car GPA	ETOH and Marijuana Premarital Sex	Religion # Persons Dated
Female Raters	2.81	7.22*	.28
Male Raters	1.28	2.45	2.80

Table 5

Chi Square Tests for Distribution of Rating Changes Across Manipulations

	Females	Males
Interval 6		
Across all manipulations (8 df)	24.90**	34.19**
Across question sets (2 df)	11.61**	11.16**
Manipulations within sets		
Alcohol/Pot (2 df)	6.47*	7.80*
Religion (2 df)	3.07	---
Car (2 df)	1.53	---
Interval 13		
Across all manipulations (8 df)	16.49*	14.46
Across question sets (2 df)	4.79	4.35
Manipulations within sets		
Sex (2 df)	8.87**	1.00
# Dated (2 df)	4.04	---
GPA (2 df)	---	---

*$p < .05$

**$p < .005$

Table 6

Cue Frequencies, Relative Frequencies and Test for Sex Differences at Level 3

	Male Frequency	Relative Frequency	Female Frequency	Relative Frequency	Chi Square[1]
Appearance	152	10.5%	81	4.3%	44.16***
Athletic Ability	3	.2%	4	.2%	---
Intelligence	63	4.4%	108	5.8%	3.24
Energy Level	24	1.7%	26	1.4%	.39
Anxiety Level	23	1.6%	24	1.3%	.53
Disposition	43	3.0%	50	2.7%	.26
Self-concept	108	7.5%	157	8.4%	.90
Sex Role	16	1.1%	1	.1%	17.42***
Introversion/Extroversion	40	2.8%	48	2.6%	.12
Sociability	56	3.9%	74	4.0%	.03
Altruism	77	5.3%	89	4.8%	.51
Conversational	100	6.9%	140	7.5%	.39*
Nonverbal	17	1.2%	9	.5%	4.93**
Sense of Humor	10	.7%	33	1.8%	7.38
Amenities	1	.1%	4	.2%	---
Status Considerations	42	2.9%	68	3.6%	1.36

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	Male Frequency	Relative Frequency	Female Frequency	Relative Frequency	Chi Square[1]
Values	94	6.5%	157	8.4%	3.92*
Interests	130	9.0%	220	11.8%	6.01*
Religion	16	1.1%	32	1.7%	2.14
Lifestyle	76	5.3%	119	6.4%	1.74
Clique	---	---	4	.2%	---
Purdue Views	12	.8%	27	1.4%	2.71
Self-comparison	8	.6%	10	.5%	.06
Type of Relationship	79	5.5%	64	3.4%	7.80**
Stereotyping	24	1.7%	25	1.3%	.57
Reactive Statements	30	2.1%	53	2.8%	1.94
Reaffirmation	18	1.2%	29	1.6%	.59
Derogatory	7	.5%	7	.4%	.27
Unclassifiable	35	2.4%	29	1.6%	3.15

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

***$p < .005$

[1]Chi square test with 1 df, includes correction for continuity. Not computed for expected values < 5.

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